## Salem County Department of Health and Human Services

## OFFICE OF DISABILITY SERVICES

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SPEAKERS OFFER INSPIRATION AT SALEM COUNTY DISABILITY AWARENESS DAY

SALEM, NJ – Lynn McClintock, an attorney struggling with spastic cerebral palsy who was the keynote speaker at the Salem County 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Disability Awareness Day Tuesday, said "You must do it all. You must do it well. And you must make it look easy. Nobody really cares how you got from point A to point B."

Lynn recounted her challenges in making it from 'point A to point B" in her wheelchair – attending a college that initially had no handicapped accessibility or support services; earning her law degree at Rutgers, and taking a five hour roundtrip bus ride every work day for seven years from Pitman to her legal position at the Office of Legislative Services at the Statehouse in Trenton.

"Nothing is easy. Nothing is very easy. But everything is doable," she said, now the Assistant Counsel for Gloucester County. "And it doesn't need to exist at present. It only needs to be your drive to make it happen."

She explained that she wanted to attend Muhlenberg College in Allentown, Pa., but the barriers were great. After her campus visit, the Board of Directors told her "Come stay with us", and they pulled together a room full of top personnel to make it happen for her.

"Whatever was needed, they made it happen. They retrofitted the lecture hall, the dorm room, any bathroom I might have to use," Lynn said. "And I had a list of sorority sisters to help me with daily tasks for the four years I was there."

Lynn said she demonstrated her determination early, and a classic example was on her 12 <sup>th</sup> birthday. After much deliberation, her parents told her she could get contact lenses if she could

put them in and take them out every day. "We went to the doctors, and two and an half hours later, I was on my way home with my contacts in."

"Disability struggles never end," she said. "Everyone has obstacles. What matters is how you overcome them."

As strong as her determination is her humor and ever-present smile. In describing spastic cerebral palsy, she said it causes all her muscles to tighten at one time and makes her voice a little squeaky.

"My sister will say, tell me again why your toes curl when you brush your hair," she said, cracking up the audience. "It makes me who I am. And gives me a very determined attitude."

A record 160 attendees and 24 vendors attended the Tenth Annual Salem County Disabilities Awareness Day, held at the Riverview Inn on July 15. The event was sponsored by the Salem County Board of Chosen Freeholders, Mid-Atlantic States Career & Education Center, and Collaborative Support Programs of NJ.

"Lynn was truly inspirational," said Freeholder Robert Vanderslice, who hosted the program.

"We are all God's children. We are all the same."

Carneys Point resident Ray Leight, a paraplegic since a 1991 car accident, made a special presentation on wheelchair dancing. He co-founded American DanceWheels Foundation with a ballroom dancer and assistance from Sandra Fortuna, mother of Brian Fortuna of Dancing with the Stars.

"I didn't want to be me," he explained after the accident happened when he was 19. "I spent nearly two years in the hospital. It took me seven years to discover dancing. We all have to perceive we are normal. I wish I knew then what I know now: You have to be perceived as normal. We – you – have to make the changes."

Also presenting during the program was Jeff Pompper, executive director of Salem County Office of Emergency Management. He discussed the importance of preparedness planning, being on the County's Register Ready list, and preparing a "go back" with supplies for three to five days.